

**Statement by Edward J. Markey (D-MA)  
House Energy and Commerce Committee  
Bioterrorism and Proposals to Combat Bioterrorism  
November 15, 2001**

Mr. Chairman, good morning and thank you for holding this important and timely hearing on bioterrorism. I join you and my colleagues in welcoming Secretary Thompson and Director Koplan and I thank them for being here today.

In 1998 Ashton Carter, John Deutch and Philip Zelikow spoke of the impending threat of terrorists using weapons of mass destruction in a Foreign Affairs magazine article called "Catastrophic Terrorism." The article opens with the following prescient and chilling description:

"If the device that exploded in 1993 under the World Trade Center had been nuclear, or had effectively dispersed a deadly pathogen, the resulting horror and chaos would have exceeded our ability to describe it. Such an act of catastrophic terrorism would be a watershed event in American history. It could involve loss of life and property unprecedented in peacetime and undermine America's fundamental sense of security, as did the Soviet atomic bomb test in 1949. Like Pearl Harbor, this event would divide our past and future into a before and after. The United States might respond with draconian measures, scaling back civil liberties, allowing wider surveillance of citizens, detention of suspects, and use of deadly force. More violence could follow, either further terrorist attacks or U.S. counterattacks. Belatedly, Americans would judge their leaders negligent for not addressing terrorism more urgently."

September 11th and the subsequent Anthrax crisis have served as the sonic boom of wake up calls that no one can ignore. Much as our nation is using its military superiority to wage a war against Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan, we must rely upon our healthcare superiority to wage a public health war against bioterrorism.

This war must include protecting dangerous bioagents from falling into enemy hands. In 1996 I introduced the "Biological Weapons Control Act of 1996" with former Representative John Kasich, and Senator Hatch. The bill imposed requirements for the transfer of select agents and was later signed into law as part of the Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996. If we had not passed this law, we would be largely in the dark with respect to who possesses which bioagents in this country. Last month the House took one more step in the battle against bioterrorism by voting to expand the 1996 law to require that all select agents be registered.

While there is no doubt that the United States has the resources and capability to wage this war, in its current form, the public health system is ill-prepared.

It is my hope that the Administration will agree to significantly increase emergency funding to the CDC so that a strong force can be deployed to combat bioterrorism. We will need the well prepared health care ground troops pre-positioned by improving hospital "surge" capacity in the event of a bioterrorist attack or epidemic. We must create the best command control center. This means providing the resources necessary to upgrade States' preparedness, improve public health laboratories and heighten disease surveillance and response and communication between state, local and federal officials. And finally, we need to provide the most sophisticated defensive weapons by expanding our current stockpiles and encouraging the development of new treatments.

And while the focus on stockpiling lately has been largely on Cipro, and smallpox vaccines we cannot be negligent in addressing other obvious and necessary protective measures.

For example, we are guilty of gross negligence for failure to stockpile potassium iodide - the Cipro of Nuclear Exposure in localities surrounding nuclear power plants. Potassium iodide is a cheap and effective protection against the cancer-causing effects of radioactive iodine on the thyroid gland. In the event of a terrorist attack on a nuclear power plant, cancer-causing radioactive iodine could be released into the surrounding area. In an urban setting it may take hours to escape the area. During Hurricane Floyd, it took some drivers 8 hours to go 35 miles. Yet the radioactive plume can travel much faster if the weather conditions permit.

In light of over 20 years of government inaction, I have introduced a bill to require the stockpiling of Potassium Iodide within the vicinity of all nuclear plants, HR 3279. Additionally, I thank you, Mr. Chairman for agreeing to work with me to address my concerns in the Commerce Bioterrorism Bill.

In closing, we've heard the clarion call to arms - we can't waste time we must address our ailing public health system. We must act responsibly lest we be judged negligent.

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